DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 313 505 CE 053 555

AUTHOR	MacDonald, Carolyn; And Others
TITLE	Providing for Adults. The Views and Policies of Providers of Education and Training. Practitioner MiniPaper 7. SCRE Publication 105.
INSTITUTION	Scottish Council for Research in Education.
REPORT NO	ISBN-0-947833-32-3
PUB DATE	89
NOTE	36p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Scottish Council for Research in Education, 15 St. John Street, Edinburgh EH8 8JR, Scotland (4.50 pounds).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research/Technical (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Access to Education; Adult Education; Adult Learning; *Adult Students; *Andragogy; Educational Facilities; Educational Policy; *Enrollment Influences; Foreign Countries; *Student Recruitment; *Student School Relationship
IDENTIFIERS	*Scotland

ABSTRACT

A study of 32 public and 25 private randomly selected providers of adult education in Scotland focused on their policies toward adult participants and the extent to which the organizations cater to adults. Data were collected from principals, deputy principals, agency managers, and other senior staff throughout Scotland but were concentrated somewhat around the central belt and around Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee, and Aberdeen. The following points summarize the results of the study: (1) providers reported that an adult clientele had a positive effect on both the teaching and the ethos of the organization; (2) if many of the problems adults face when returning to education and training stem from domestic commitments, providers could help by supplying child care, counseling and flexible format and timing of courses; (3) providers stressed that their offerings had to be of high quality, necessitating regular inservice training for teachers of adults, attractive physical surroundings, and teaching methods that take into account adults' differing abilities; (4) providers believed that the most effective forms of publicity were those targeted directly at adults; (5) they believed some adults suffered financial hardship partly due to rules and regulations governing concessionary fees and recommended that deferring payment become an option; (6) providers said they needed to be flexible about the entry requirements for adult students; (7) providers felt they needed more money to improve publicity and develop the facilities to attract adults; (8) they recommended speedier processing of grants; and (9) they thought it crucial that the government help convince individuals, providers, and employers that adult training and education is valuable and important. (CML)

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PROVIDING for ADULTS

The views and policies of providers of education and training

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PROVIDING FOR ADULTS

The Views and Policies of Providers of Education and Training

Carolyn MacDonald, Kevin Lowden and Pamela Munn

The Scottish Council for Research in Education

SCRE PUBLICATION 105

Practitioner MiniPaper 7

ISBN 0 947833 32 3

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Printed and bound in Great Britain for The Scottish Council for Research in Education by Russell Print, 14 Forrest Street, Blantyre, Glasgow G72 0JP

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1 Key Findings and their Implications

Background

This study gives a snapshot of the nature and scope of education and training for adults based on a sample of agencies and institutions which provide such courses. It looks at the extent to which these providers are catering for adults, their policies towards adult participants and their experiences of them. It is part of a project on Opportunities for Mature Students, commissioned by the Scottish Education Department (SED). The decision to commission research grew out of a number of labour market concerns. Two of these concerns provide the background to the research reported here: a flexible and adaptable workforce is needed to generate and sustain economic growth and recurrent education and training are a means to that end. The study reported here is only one aspect of a project designed to focus on these concerns. The project includes a survey of a sample of the general population, case studies and smaller surveys of specific groups. The focus of the present report is on one of these particular groups: providers of education and training in Scotland.

Until recently, the education and training of adults in any substantial numbers have been left to a relatively small group of providers. This, however, is beginning to change as more and more providers try to move into the adult market. For many, as traditional markets begin to dwindle, this move has been the result of economic necessity. For others, it has resulted from the realisation that adults are going to become an important resource in filling critical skill shortages. And, for some providers, it is the chance to build on an existing commitment to offer educational and training opportunities to the whole community. Whatever the reasons for this trend, it would seem that it is one which is likely to continue.

The findings and implications are divided into those which are most relevant to providers and those directed at local or central government. There is obviously some overlap between these but this division has been made for the convenience of the reader. The issues summarised here are elaborated upon in Chapter 6.

Note: The term adult is used in different ways by different providers (see page 5). Broadly speaking, the public sector defined adult as either 16 plus or 21plus, while the private sector was more likely to use 18 plus.

For providers

		chapter
Positive effects of adults	Providers found that an adult clientele had a positive effect on both the teaching and the ethos of the institution. Other providers who move into the adult market are likely to experience similar benefits.	3
Help providers can offer	Providers believed that many of the problems which adults faced when returning to education and training stemmed from personal and domestic commitments. If this belief is correct, providers could help adult returners by providing -	3
childcare facilities	Women were seen as being restricted in their ability to participate in education and training because of commitments to children. The provision of childcare facilities is, therefore, an important means of overcoming a barrier to women's participation.	3

		chapter
counselling	Providers found that adults often experienced difficulties in adjusting to study and training. The provision of counselling and guidance services is one way of helping adults cope with these difficulties.	3
flexibility of provision	Flexibility in the format and timing of courses was thought by providers to be particularly attractive to adults. To provide for adults, in a way which fits in with their home and work commitments, an increased emphasis on short programmes, open learning and part-time courses is recommended.	3/4
High quality 'product'	Providers stressed that the 'product' which they offered had to be of high quality. The product means course content, teaching methods and the physical surroundings in which courses are taught. Without a high quality product even the best marketing policies would ultimately fail. This suggests the need for regular in-service training for teachers of adult returners. It also suggests the need for comfortable and attractive physical surroundings.	3/4
Variety in teaching methods	Because of the varying experience and background of adults, some providers thought it important to use teaching methods which took into account adults' differing abilities. The teaching methods which these providers saw as most appropriate include individualised learning, student-centred learning, one-to-one tuition and the use of continuous and progressive assessment.	3
Institutional facilities	Adults wanted comfortable common rooms and places for private study. They have higher expectations, according to providers, than younger students. The message for providers who want to move into the adult market is that shabby surroundings and a lack of facilities put adults off.	3
Publicity	Providers believed that the most effective forms of publicity were those targeted directly at adults. Those who want to attract adults into their institutions should consider gearing their publicity specifically at adults and taking the message out to the places in the community where adults tend to congregate.	4
Financial hardship	Providers believed some adults suffered financial hardship partly due to the limiting nature of the rules and regulations governing concessionary fees. A sympathetic attitude to such adults and the option of deferring payment of fees may help to alleviate some of the financial difficulties experienced by adults.	3/4
Entry requirements	Providers said they needed to be flexible about the formal entry requirements asked of adults. In considering the suitability of an adult for entry to a course, flexibility and open-mindedness in assessing the previous experience of adults is necessary.	4

Diversity of courses	The types of courses which providers thought particularly attractive to adults spanned a range of subject areas, modes of attendance and course format. This suggests that, in catering for adults, diversity in provision and delivery is important.	4

Local and Central Government

Need for investment	Providers felt that, because of limited budgets, they were constrained in the extent to which they could attract and cater for adults. Providers felt that they needed more money in order to: • improve publicity and target particular adult groups • develop the facilities needed to attract adults.	3
Speedier processing of grants	Providers thought that the rules governing grants and bursaries added to the financial and personal difficulties experienced by adults. If grant-awarding bodies could speed up administrative procedures, adults could be sure that they would not be left for periods of time without financial support. In addition, flexibility in interpreting the attendance regulations would help adults who have to take time off because of domestic commitments.	3
Role of government	The providers saw the government's role in determining individuals', providers' and employers' attitudes to training as being crucial. Government is in the best position to help to create an ethos in which training is seen as important and valuable. This is particularly necessary if adults are to be equipped with future high technology skills. This suggests the need for targeted publicity about opportunities as well as financial incentives to encourage participation.	5

Areas for further research

	The effectiveness of publicity in attracting adult returners (particularly the semi-skilled and unskilled).	4
	The prevalence and effects of financial difficulties experienced by adults who return to education and training.	6

We would like to thank all those who helped us with this survey. In particular, we wish to acknowledge the courtesy and co-operation given to us by the providers who took part in the study. Their willingness to take part, and the amount of time that they gave us, made our job both interesting and pleasurable. We would also like to thank members of our Advisory Committee who have given helpful advice and support at all stages of this survey. Finally, we would like to express our thanks to Janette Finlay who typed this report.

2 Aims and Sample

Aims

The research had two main aims:

- to find out about providers' experiences of adult participants
- to explore providers' general policies towards adult participants.

For clarity, we have simplified the terminology used to describe types of provider. The 'non-public' sector consisted of a variety of different kinds of provider including private agencies, voluntary agencies, and charitable organisations. However, because of the dominance of private agencies we have called this sector 'the private sector' for brevity and convenience. Similarly, when not differentiating between the public and private sectors the term 'institution' covers all the different types of providers in our study.

The sample

In order to cover a wide range of providers of education and training, a random sample was drawn in approximately equal proportions from the following two categories:

- public sector providers (ie universities, central institutions, further education colleges and other local authority provision)
- private sector providers (eg the voluntary agencies, charitable organisations, trade unions).

We would stress that, although random selection was used to draw up our sample, our data from these providers only supply us with a 'snapshot' of their views concerning adult returners. It is not possible to generalise from this data to all providers.

Table 2.1(a): The public sector sample

	number
Further education colleges	11
3 Universities (3 departments in each)	9
Central institutions	3
Adult basic education	3
Schools	2
Open learning institutions	2
Colleges of education	1
Community education	1
Total number of institutions/departments	*32*

Table 2.1(b): The private sector sample

	number
Private agencies	13
ITBs/Group training agencies	3
WEA	1
Voluntary services	1
Trade union	1
Other	6
Total number of agencies	*25*

It is important to note also that providers within each category did not form a homogeneous group. Instead, both categories (but particularly the private sector) include a wide range of diverse organisations. This means that any differences which we highlight between the public and private sectors may not be true of *all* members in each sector. In particular, because private agencies make up the largest proportion of the private sector, random selection meant that more of them were included in the sample, and,

therefore, their responses predominated in that category. Because of the diversity of adult provision between departments in universities, we undertook interviews in three different faculties in each university. These were in Arts or Social Science, Sciences and Adult Education. In all, because three universities appeared in our sample, nine interviews were conducted in universities.

The total sample consisted of 57 institutions, agencies or departments. The geographic spread of the sample reflected provision throughout Scotland. There is greater density of provision around the central belt and around the four cities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, Dundee and Aberdeen.

The interviews

The interviewees were principals, depute principals, agency managers or other senior staff. We collected information using a mixture of face-to-face and telephone interviews. A comparison of the data obtained from the face-to-face and telephone interviews suggests that, in terms of the quality of answers, there is little difference between them.

The interview included:

- information about the number of adult students on courses
- how providers defined 'adult student'
- providers' policies, if any, for attracting adults
- course provision specifically for adults
- differences providers saw between adults and others
- the sorts of problems or learning needs adults had in the providers' experience.

Who counts as an adult student or trainee?

As expected, different providers had different definitions of the age at which an individual was regarded as an adult student or trainee but the picture is not quite as fragmented as it appears. Providers using 16+ were normally those specifically involved in adult education: adult basic education centres, community education and university departments of adult education. Further education colleges and higher education institutions typically used 21. Private agencies were most likely to use the 18 or over definition. Interestingly enough, for grant awarding purposes, the Scottish Education Department defines a mature student in higher education as someone aged 26 or over.

Table 2.2: Providers' definitions of an adult student trainee

	number (total = 57)
Adult students/trainees are -	
- Over 16 years	14
- 18 years or over	13
- 21 years or over	13
- 23 years or over	4
- Employer or Training Agency specified	2
- Those with relevant experience/qualification	2
- Those with gap from initial education	1
- Don't use age categories/not ageist	4
- No definition given	4

The effect of type of provider
The public sector defined adults as either 16+ or 21+. The private sector was more likely to use 18+ as a definition.

Numbers of adult students

We had intended to collect information on the number of adults undertaking education and training in the agencies and institutions we sampled but, for a number of reasons, this proved impossible to do. We first approached the public sector institutions directly and they referred us to the Scottish Education Department (SED) Statistics Department. However, SED statistics for advanced courses in public sector institutions are based on *entrants* to courses who were aged 21 years or over, and subsequent projections are made from these. Although we found these projections interesting, this way of collecting student numbers did not help us to calculate the total number of adult students in these institutions because it did not tell us anything about students who had gone on to the second, third or fourth year of a course.

In addition, private sector providers were often either unable to give us accurate figures on the numbers and proportions of full-time and part-time adult students, or else the criteria used to define an adult student (see Table 2.2 above) were so different as to make a comparison difficult.

3 Differences between Adult and Younger Students — Providers' Views

What are providers' experiences of adult students? Do they see adults as being different in any way from their younger clientele? Do they think that there are particular difficulties faced by adult returners? And is it worthwhile - from the providers' point of view - in having adult participants? It is these questions which we address in this chapter.

> ***The effect of type of provider***
> There appeared to be little difference between public and private providers in their perceptions of adult participants

All of the providers thought that it was worthwhile having adult participants. In several cases, the differences which they perceived between adult and other participants highlighted the advantages of having adult students. The differences identified by providers fell into six main (though overlapping) groups: motivation; lack of self confidence; personal problems; views of education and training; expectations and attitudes; and study habits, class work and performances. Seven providers felt unable to identify differences either because they dealt solely with adults or because their experience of adult students or trainees was limited to only a very few. Of the remaining 50, all but two thought that there were differences. Nine providers qualified their answers, however, by saying that it was difficult to generalise because differences often stemmed from factors such as social class, life experience, gender and the actual course taken, rather than simply from being an adult student.

Motivation

This was the most commonly mentioned difference. In general, adults were thought to be better motivated. Often they were participating because they wanted to be there and usually with a specific aim or purpose. Since adults had taken into account the implications of their return, they were felt likely to work harder and, therefore, to get more out of their course.

> *The young people who've been in, they're, you might say, institutionalised to a certain extent. They accept it as a learning facility but don't necessarily put themselves wholeheartedly into it unless they've got a specific direction at the end of it. Whereas an adult, in lots of cases, comes purely activated to learn... There's a wide myriad of elements that come in there. If an adult's been unemployed for a period of time, the motivation feature there is to get themselves back into the employment market - which is a high motivation feature. They're obviously keen to learn.* [Private agency]

However, as we shall see later in this chapter, despite their high motivation, adults were still likely to experience difficulties in adjusting to study.

Bound up with the difference in motivation, was adults' greater maturity. However, external factors, such as having been sent by their employer or having paid fees, were also seen as playing a part in an adult's motivation to participate. It was interesting, however, that two providers felt that some of the employer-sponsored adults actually *lacked* motivation when compared with adults who themselves had chosen to participate.

Lack of self confidence

Although adults who returned were, in general, thought to be more highly motivated than youngsters, they also often lacked confidence in their own abilities. Initially, they tended to be apprehensive and had a strong need for reassurance. Adults were particularly worried about making mistakes and felt inhibited about admitting to what they did not know. Providers thought this was especially evident in classes where there were a lot of youngsters or where managers were learning beside their subordinates. Some providers talked about how their clients (especially the unemployed) often felt that there was no hope for them and this affected their confidence and their ability to learn.

Providers tried to encourage self-confidence in a number of ways. One way to build confidence was by showing adults what they could achieve when on the course.

> *They have a negative self-image which is something the educational encounter has to overcome. But it does overcome it and the confidence which emerges from achieving is of a much higher staying power than younger students.* [Further education college]

Another way in which providers tried to increase confidence was to show adults that they could build up a wide range of transferable skills.

> *We try to convince [trainees] of breadth of training, where they can see there's the possibility of switching from job to job... to try and move them away from the specific nature of skills and to let them see that the skills that they use can be adaptable into other areas - transferableness... The main aspect is the breadth of skills that you use - through hard skills, their knowledge skills, their effective skills. We try to develop them as much as we can. These are skills that are totally transferable. People still think there should be a tramline route for this... and we try to get them thinking wider than this.* [Private agency]

Personal problems

Adults were seen as differing from younger students in that there were specific personal problems that adults might face. Problems which were mentioned by more than one provider are shown below.

Table 3.1: Personal problems affecting adults' return to study: providers' views (in order of frequency of citation)

- Fitting the course or training into their own work or domestic routine
- Childcare and commitments to children
- Financial problems
- Lack of space to study at home
- Health problems (including stress)
- Marriage problems (including husbands trying to prevent their wives from taking courses)
- Travel

For some of these problems there are no ready solutions; for others, however, providers thought that more could be done given commitment and also the financial means. In most cases, being flexible was the key to helping adult participants. We identified evidence of six different areas in which providers could demonstrate a sympathetic attitude towards the problems which adults may have. These are discussed next.

Ways of helping adult returners

***Flexibility in timing*:** In order to help adults to deal with the problem of fitting a course into their work or domestic routine, some providers organised courses at times to suit that particular adult group. Such flexibility in timing was not yet the norm, however, and the further education colleges, in particular, were beginning to consider whether they should introduce such changes on a wider scale.

> *I think there's a tremendous market out there in adult education. It might well be that if we want to increase our workload in it, we'd have to think seriously about the starting and finishing times. There must be a tremendous market starting about 9.10, 9.15 [am] and finishing at 3 o'clock. This is a concept we haven't tried before.* [Further education college]

Creches: Seven of the fifty-seven providers mentioned that they ran creches and others said that they would like to but were constrained either by of the unsuitability of their buildings or by lack of money.

The importance of commitments to children as a factor affecting participation came out strongly in our earlier survey of the general adult population (Munn *and* MacDonald, 1988). Twenty-two per cent of women gave this as the most important reason for non-participation in adult education and training. In that report we pointed out that the provision of creche or similar childcare facilities was the one tangible way of encouraging some non-participants to return to education and training.

Reducing financial pressures: Although the financial problems that adults have cannot necessarily be removed, they can be lessened by grant-awarding bodies speeding up their administrative processes. Several providers mentioned this issue and one pointed out that even a delay of a few weeks in receiving a bursary can be financially crippling.

> *It's important that their bursary comes through very quickly because as soon as they enrol all allowances stop. If their bursary takes three weeks to come - that's not uncommon - they have to be able to live for 3 weeks without money coming in. That is a horrendous problem.* [Further education college]

Most providers were not in a position to help in such cases. Sometimes they could allow a deferment in the payment of fees or give the adult time off to chase up the appropriate authorities, but usually they could do nothing more than be sympathetic. Several providers mentioned that at this early stage some adults drop out of courses or programmes because of these financial pressures.

***Guidance service*:** Most providers offered some sort of guidance or counselling service. In many establishments there was a general guidance service available for all students, but whether such guidance staff were familiar with the particular needs and problems of adults is uncertain. In some institutions or agencies it was up to adults to make the first move. In others, guidance staff themselves took the initiative. Sometimes this would take the form of specific counselling prior to entry. This might involve trying to assess whether the course or programme was suitable and encouraging those with unrealistic expectations to 'start with small steps'. In addition, some providers offered short 'back to study courses' either before, or at the beginning of, a programme of study. One private provider had an initial three week

assessment period to see if the particular programme suited the individual. Another used psychometric and practical testing methods to assess the occupation that the adult seemed best suited to and her/his ability to cope with that particular industry.

However, despite such attempts to help adults return to study and training, it still often took time for adults to adjust.

> *...despite their commitment, it may take them quite a while to get themselves used to studying again and that clearly can quite often be difficult if they've still got relatively young children and therefore they've got strong family commitments as soon as they get home. So [one problem is] the ability of changing themselves back into a studying-type routine, especially if they're having to do that in an environment which may not necessarily be conducive to it.* [University]

Attendance: A few providers mentioned the need to have a sympathetic attitude towards adults' attendance problems which, for instance, stemmed from taking time off to look after sick children.

Availability of facilities: There was an attempt in a few cases to keep facilities (such as libraries) open late so that adults could use them at times which were most appropriate. One public provider admitted, however, that they were 'not terribly flexible in providing appropriate facilities for adults'.

Views on education and training

Providers saw adults as having different views on education and training from youngsters. However, providers had conflicting views about these differences. Some (public sector) providers believed that adults valued education more than youngsters did and that adults wanted to study for its own sake rather than for vocational motives. Other providers (in both sectors) felt that adults saw 'courses as training' while 'youngsters see it as a balance between education and training'. One public provider said that while young students did the minimum amount of work to get through the course, adult students tended to apply themselves because of a desire to please both themselves and the tutor. However, in contrast to this, two private providers thought that there was a difficulty in training adults. Youngsters were more amenable to being trained because they had been through the education system more recently. Adults, on the other hand, were 'more resistant' because they had been working and were unused to learning in more formal ways (ie outside the workplace).

Expectations and attitudes

Adults were also seen as reacting to the providing institution in particular ways. Providers thought that adults expected certain minimum standards of facilities whereas youngsters tended to 'take what comes'. In order to encourage adults to participate, it was necessary to provide an environment which was welcoming and not reminiscent of a school atmosphere. Two of the public providers had annexes which were used to accommodate adults and one of the schools had provided a common room for their adult students. Some providers attempted to make their institutions more inviting by having a common room for adults, offering coffee and newspapers, being 'service-oriented, having empathy for our clients' or even taking the courses or programmes out to the adults' own localities. However, financial constraints often meant that there was a limit to the extent to which providers could change the physical environment.

We're fortunate in this college that we've grown over the last few years to 8 or 10 times what we were 13 or 14 years ago. The problem with that is... that we've a lot of student accommodation which is not as we'd like it to be and therefore adults are tending not to have the kind of services in this college that they might in another college. [Further education college]

On the question of how adults fitted into the institution, providers were again mixed in their views. Some thought that adults were more likely to believe in the rules and regulations and to maintain the proper codes of conduct. Others felt that adults expected fewer regulations and wanted less regimentation.

Study habits, class work and performance

Differences: The views of providers on differences between adult and younger participants in terms of study habits and 'class' work fell into three distinct groups.

- (the most common response) Providers believed that adults were generally 'superior' to younger participants. Not only were the former more active in class and more willing to participate in discussions, they were also viewed as being more capable of working on their own. They tended to have more self-discipline and to be better organised. In addition, they were more likely to make frequent use of the academic facilities available.
- (most commonly cited by those in adult basic education, community education, the WEA and the voluntary services) It was difficult to generalise because it was dependent on factors such as gender, social class and life circumstances.
- (most common among private providers) There were no differences between the abilities of adults and youngsters to learn, and it all really depended on the right attitude of mind.

> *[Adults'] ability to learn once they release themselves from the confines they've got their minds on is absolutely no different [from young trainees]. The learning process goes on and on until they move into the graveside!* [Private agency]

Experience and speed: Providers saw adults' greater experience of the world and industry as an advantage in learning. It often meant that adults had better practical skills than youngsters and that they picked up the content of practically-oriented courses more quickly. In addition, being older was seen as an advantage in areas such as the Social Sciences. However, this view of adults' learning abilities being superior was not shared by all of the fifty-seven interviewees. A few providers felt that older adults tended to learn more slowly than younger ones. However, one interviewee said that such adults made up for this by devising strategies to counter it. In terms of the content of subjects studied, two private sector providers felt that adults had more difficulty than youngsters with quantifiable skills and theoretical concepts.

Adult problems with learning: Although providers were generally positive about adults' ability to learn, they said that there were particular learning difficulties experienced by adults. Below, we show the types of learning or study difficulties that providers thought adults had. Only those mentioned by more than one provider are included.

Teaching and learning strategies: The learning strategies of adults were viewed as being different from those of younger participants. Providers believed adults preferred activity,

discovery and interactive learning to lectures and had a desire to understand and digest. Youngsters, on the other hand, wanted to 'soak up and regurgitate material for exams'.

Table 3.2: Adults' learning difficulties: providers' views (in order of frequency of citation)

- Lack of study habits or academic learning skills
- More likely to lack experience of new technology
- Difficulties with mathematical, analytical and theoretical aspects
- Underestimating the amount of work to be done in their 'spare time'
- More resistant to training because they have been out of the educational system
- Adults without normal entrance requirements may struggle with the more academic parts of the course
- Apprehensiveness about exams/tests

One private provider who specialised in foreign language courses believed that the learning problems that adults faced stemmed not from their age but from a lack of belief in their own learning processes. This then became the starting point from which to develop a teaching methodology appropriate for adults.

> *The starting point for me of any educational process for adults [is] to provide a methodology which has as a first ingredient confidence... The second element is... to develop the knowledge that they already know but that they haven't analysed and, therefore, before you teach them anything new you have to make them reflect on what they know already to show them it's not as difficult as they thought initially... Adults are usually people who think they haven't been using their brain for a long time... and therefore they think they have lost the ability to learn. But they're actually very sharp. [It's imperative] to develop the notion of observation in what you already know, in whatever field you're in. So basically, I train people to be their own trainers. I don't give the end product, I give them the key to be able to activate language.* [Private agency]

Several of the providers mentioned that they used teaching methods and structures which they thought were particularly appropriate for adults. These included student-centred learning, distance learning, part-time study, individualised programmed learning, continuous and progressive assessment, making training specific rather than general and one-to-one tuition. In addition to using such methods, guidance staff or tutors were said to be available to help adults with any learning or training problems they had.

> *There are more adults who go to [the counsellor] in the first term of college, but a lot less in the second and third... the Christmas watershed occurs and group cohesion, confidence and so on are achieved. The implication of that as far as we can see is that guidance and counselling staff should concentrate on adults in the first term.* (Further education college]

Achievements: Providers were mixed in their views on the achievements or progress of adults. The most common view was that not only did adults progress faster than youngsters but they were also likely to achieve better results. In addition, their drop-out rate was lower than younger students.

We've had some absolutely superb mature students, with the most unlikely backgrounds, who've done remarkably well... If you take the old fashioned measure of output in terms of quality of degree awarded, in general, mature students tend to go out with a higher number of 2:1s and firsts than the average 17 or 18 year old entrant... but if you look at it in terms of the way people's lives... [and] perceptions of things have been changed and the sorts of opportunities that have opened up to people, that's really what's important about it. [University]

The alternative view was that adults needed to work at their own pace and older adults, in particular, tended to be slower. Often adults needed additional time to do a programme of study or training because of life changes and existing commitments.

***Effects of adults in the class*:** All of the providers who talked about the experience of teaching adults felt that it was a rewarding one. They believed that adults were an asset to the class because they stimulated the interest of the younger students and often encouraged them to participate more. In some cases, adults also had useful experience to contribute to the class and this helped to show youngsters the relevance of education to the outside world. Some tutors also found that when there were adults in the class they had to rethink how they would tackle their subject and this made teaching more stimulating for them too.

However, there were practical problems when dealing with adults. There was the danger that some tutors might feel threatened by the tendency of adults to question what they were being taught. And, in addition to this, there was the extra time involved both in teaching those who did not have the appropriate background in the subject and in trying to attract them in the first place.

Conclusions

Providers saw adults as differing from younger participants in a number of ways. In several cases these differences resulted in adults experiencing problems or difficulties, many of which had to be addressed by providers. This had involved providers in trying to vary their teaching methods as well as making changes to the timing and delivery of courses. However, despite this, attracting an adult clientele was seen as being both worthwhile and rewarding by providers. But how did providers go about trying to attract adult participants? It is to this question which we now turn.

4 Attracting Adult Students

General policies

The majority of providers either had an explicit policy of trying to attract adults or said that in practice it worked out this way. Only six providers had no explicit or implicit policy on attracting adults. These were providers who felt that it was either impractical, or unnecessary, to target on any particular type of student or trainee because:

- they were in a remote area
- they concentrated on particular subject areas
- their courses appealed to all age groups.

> ***The effect of type of provider***
> Attracting adults only if there was a specific contract to do so was limited solely to private providers. In contrast, those in the public sector were more likely to say that they had different policies for adults than for younger students. Such differences centred on having different entrance requirements for adults, providing access courses or specifically targeting publicity towards adults.

Only four of the 57 providers said that they had a written policy on attracting adults. Only one of those four was in the private sector. Such policies focused on the need to provide flexible study arrangements (such as part-time degrees or open learning) or on alternative entry procedures for adults who did not have the standard entry qualifications.

It is worth pointing out that both size and type of provider are likely to affect policy. Smaller establishments, particularly those in the private sector, are often able to respond more quickly to market demands and, therefore, may be less likely to have formal or rigid policies. It is, no doubt ,also true that the existence of a policy on adult participation does not mean that an institution necessarily sticks to it!

Publicity

A wide variety of means of publicity was used by providers, although advertising in the media (particularly newspapers) was the most common. Table 4.1 shows the most popular methods used to attract adult students.

Table 4.1: Most common methods of publicity (in order of frequency of citation)

- Advertising in the media
- Advertising in public places (such as libraries, sports centres)
- Word of mouth by former students/trainees
- Talking to community groups
- Information in jobcentres and centres for the unemployed

Certain providers realised that, in order to attract adults (especially the semi-skilled, unskilled and unemployed), it was important to get out into the community.

> *We [further education colleges] are not very good about getting out of our own place. So we've got to make time to get out... [Attracting adults] just doesn't happen without effort.*

The effect of type of provider
Public providers talked to community groups more than did private providers. Private providers tended to use mailshots to employers, advertising in BT's Yellow Pages and adverts in trade periodicals.

This difference in strategy reflects the different markets at which publicity is targeted: private providers at employers, public providers at individuals.

Focus of publicity

***The quality of courses*:** In order to attract adults in particular, providers felt that it was important to remember that the product had to be a good one because, without that, even the best marketing policy would ultimately fail.

> *You've got to remember, further education is a voluntary set-up. Nobody needs to come to us. That means we have to work very, very hard for our clients. We've also got to do a very very good job on them because they are our best advert. If they've enjoyed a course with us, they'll go out and tell somebody else.* [Further education college]

> *Our philosophy is very much product and service orientated... We try, in discussion with our clients and our staff, to get a product together which we think is useful. We then try and market it in a very service-oriented way, in which people are treated in a way that they're used to being treated in the local market. If people go to a place and it's grotty and they don't get a service, they don't go back. We try and be very friendly to our clients and give them a service and try and keep them in an attitude where if they see their friends they recommend us. That's very important especially in a small city where if people have a bad experience it spreads so quickly that you lose your customers.* ['Other', private provider]

***What message?*:** In the main, publicity was used to inform potential clients about the courses or programmes which were available. Occasionally, however, its purpose was to alert adults to the changing nature of education and training, to the fact that adults were as welcome as youngsters and to draw attention to the more flexible arrangements that were made for adults. However, getting this message across was not particularly easy.

> *One of the major problems in this area is getting adults to know what we have to offer and then, when they know, helping adults to realise that it could be for them... There is a huge market and there are loads of people who probably don't know what they want but if they had a second chance they might. It's to let them know that's there. And raising the awareness of adults that education, particularly in Scotland, has changed, particularly in the FE area, and with the different teaching methods and so on there's*

an opportunity there for people if they care to take it. But how do you make people aware of these changes? Because their perceptions are rows of seats and everyone looking at the back of the person in front of them. But that's all beginning to change - it's chipping away in lots of small areas. [Further education college]

It was also thought important to let adults know that not only were adults welcome but that adult participation was more common now.

> *Adults are frightened that they're going to be coming into a class with people who are 16 and they'll be the only adults. They don't seem to realise that it actually is common now... it's only once they come in and sit in a student common room that they see that there is such a vast age range... That's the reaction you always get "Oh, I didn't realise there'd be people my age here!".* [Further education college]

These findings on the importance of informing adults about the wide range of opportunities available and the ways in which education and training differ from stereotyped views mirror those which emerged from our earlier survey of the general adult population (see Munn *and* MacDonald, 1988).

Organisational procedures for attracting adults

Entry requirements: The providers in our sample recognised the need to be flexible about formal entry requirements. Most public sector institutions operated a scheme whereby the normal entrance requirements could be relaxed for mature students. In some cases, the circumstances under which this could take place were clearly laid out. In other cases, however, it was left to the 'principal's discretion' as to whether relevant experience or experiental learning could be substituted for 'paper qualifications'.

***Selection procedures*:** Some providers in each sector used interviews or selection panels to assess the suitability of adults for particular courses. Often such interviews would involve counselling and might result in redirecting the interviewee towards a different, more suitable course or, indeed, a different type of provider. In a very small number of cases, both public and private sector organisations might require an adult to undertake some sort of test to assess their suitability for a particular course or programme. This might take the form of writing an essay or undergoing a mechanical comprehension test.

***Ability to pay*:** Two providers (one in each sector) took a very pragmatic view on adult entry: they said that if adults 'could pay, then they could enter'. A further two (again one from each sector) firmly believed that there should not be discrimination between students on the basis of age and said that 'all students are judged on individual merit or ability'.

***Quotas*:** None of the providers in our survey had special quotas for adult students. They felt, instead, that it was more appropriate to judge potential entrants on their individual merits and to try to ensure a balance of older and younger students. Representatives from two of the further education colleges also pointed out that quotas were unnecessary because they were 'not in the habit of turning customers away'.

Occasionally, general quotas were operated on all students either because of restrictions on the total number of places on a course or because a Training Agency contract might impose limitations. Only one college (a central institution) mentioned a quota which had a more direct influence on adults. This concerned allowing up to 7% of those who did not have formal entry qualifications into a first year Art and Design course if their portfolios were outstanding: in general, such students tended to be adults.

Concessionary Fees: The perception that cost could act as a barrier to participation (see Chapter 3) had led many providers to offer concessionary fees. In total, 27 of the 57 providers offered some sort of concessionary fee and a further four said that all their classes were free to adults. An interesting finding within the public sector was that all the local authority funded providers offered concessionary fees and this was explained to us as being the result of Regional policy.

> ***The effect of type of provider***
> The availability of concessionary fees was much less common in the private sector; over half of providers in that sector compared with under a quarter in the public sector said that they did not offer such concessions. However, all of the private providers who said that they did not offer concessionary fees explained that this was unnecessary because individuals were either sponsored by their employers or the Training Agency.

Providers offered a diverse range of concessions. These included discounts or the waiving of fees for those who were:

- disabled
- financially disadvantaged (including the unemployed and single parents)
- living in Areas of Priority Treatment
- not sent by employers
- part-time students (in particular, those studying under the 21 hour rule)
- retired
- taking more than one course.

Other concessions ranged from fees being, to some extent, negotiable in cases of hardship through to the opportunity to pay in instalments.

Attracting specific adult groups

Targeting: There has been an increased recognition in recent years that certain sections of society may need further encouragement if they are to return to education and training. One way in which providers have attempted to do this is by appealing directly to those adult groups. 58% of the providers in our sample said that they had some sort of policy to attract specific adult groups and a further 7% said that in practice it worked out that there was some targeting of groups. Of those who did not have such a policy, two said that they were against having this type of discrimination or segregation because it led to resentment from other participants. And one provider felt that the explicit targeting of certain groups of adults may be resented by these very people because of a dislike of being labelled.

Target groups: In general, target groups were likely to be those which were seen as being educationally or socially disadvantaged, including those who had been under-represented in the educational sector in the past. Table 4.2 shows the target groups most commonly mentioned by providers.

Table 4.2: Target groups (in order of frequency of citation)

- The unemployed
- Women
- The disadvantaged (financially and socially)
- The retired
- Ethnic minorities
- Those about to be made redundant
- The disabled
- Single parents
- Employees
- The working class
- Professionals

The difference in level of specificity of these groups is interesting. They range from very specific groups like single parents to very wide-ranging groups like the working class and professionals. Obviously, trying to target publicity on such groups is more difficult if the group is very diverse. Perhaps, though, providers could learn something from marketing experts who have long realised the importance of using appropriate modes of publicity for particular groups. Such targeting is obviously going to be costly and the larger the number of specific groups, the greater the cost is likely to be. However, if it succeeded in generating more income from fees, then these costs would be recouped.

The effect of type of provider

Attracting specific adult groups was more common among public rather than private providers (64% compared to 50% respectively). In terms of client groups, the main difference between the two sectors was that private providers were less likely to concentrate specifically on attracting female participants.

Trying to attract these groups was most commonly done by offering discounts or free courses. Often, in the public sector, this was the result of Regional policy and the amount of flexibility that individual providers had was limited.

Attracting adults to specific courses

The majority of providers did not try to attract adults to specific areas. Instead, they said that their provision was generally available to all and that demand was client-led or (usually in the case of private training organisations) that the Training Agency or employers gave them the specifications for the adult training that they did. Just under a quarter of the providers (mainly those in the public sector) said that they did try to attract adults to specific subjects or programmes. The types of courses mentioned by more than one provider are shown in Table 4.3. Some of the providers also tried to attract particular groups (usually the unemployed and women) by offering courses or programmes specifically aimed at that group. It was interesting, though, that many of these targeted programmes were sponsored by the Training Agency and that very few providers had devised courses apart from these.

Table 4.3: Courses to which providers tried to attract adults (in order of frequency of citation)

- Non-vocational/leisure classes
- Access courses
- Adult-only SCE classes
- Professional updating courses
- Business Studies
- Training Agency programmes
- Social and political issues
- Adult basic education

***Adult-only classes*:** Adult-only classes, in particular, were often seen as helping adults to build their confidence in unfamiliar subject areas. In one school, for instance, the increased demand for a generally unpopular subject among adults - mathematics - was thought to be due to offering such classes.

> *The one factor which I believe has led to that success last year was the creation of an adult-only class... It's maybe a feeling of inadequacy that many people have in Maths - that they didn't want to be seen being unable to cope by a pupil group.* [School]

***Popular/'suitable' courses*:** Although the majority of providers did not try to attract adults to particular courses, they were able to identify programmes or forms of provision that seemed particularly suitable for adults or which proved popular with them. There was no particular pattern to these and they covered a wide range of the provision available. Table 4.4 shows those courses or forms of provision which were mentioned by more than one provider, and gives a flavour of what was thought to be popular among adults.

Table 4.4: Provision seen as popular with adults (in order of frequency of citation)

- Computing/New Technology/Word Processing
- Art/Art and Design
- Post-experience/Professional Updating Courses
- Social services/Caring Courses
- General Non-Vocational/Leisure Courses
- Business/Management
- Home Economics/Catering
- Part-time Courses
- Modular Courses
- Open Learning

What is interesting about this list is the mixture of different subject areas, modes of attendance and course structure. It emphasises the importance of diversity in provision and the danger of assuming that adults form a single group with homogeneous needs. Providers are increasingly turning their thoughts to ways of presenting courses which make them more attractive to adults. Open learning, part-time and short courses are all thought to fit in well with an adult's work or home circumstances.

> *The way that we're providing short courses is clearly beginning to attract adults - the fact that they do not have to undertake a vast course to reach certain objectives, they don't have to take a massive diet, they can take small parts out of it, they can dip without the total commitment to leave their jobs... It's allowing us to market education for adults much more satisfactorily.* [Further education college]

***Less popular courses*:** Although the majority of providers did not think that aspects of their programme were unsuitable for adults, (one third) said that there were areas which were less popular among adults. Once again, a diverse range of areas was mentioned. Table 4.5 shows those courses referred to by more than one provider.

Table 4.5: Courses seen as less popular with adults (in order of frequency of citation)

- Social/political/philosophical issues
- Science/Maths/Statistics
- Electronics/'High Technology' (eg Computer Aided Design, Computer Aided Engineering, Electronic Production)
- Book-keeping/Accounts

This raises the question - why were these unpopular? Our research suggested three possible reasons —

- **Employers' reluctance** -Employers still need to be convinced of the value of training in the high technology area. Two of the private providers pointed out that there was a lack of foresight by employers about training in such areas.

> *If this doesn't give an insight into industry's outlook on training, nothing does. Our biggest flop in training provision is [Computer Aided Design]... [It] is an example of what is to come, it's inevitable, absolutely inevitable. Convincing the companies that they need to train folk in it - disaster time... It's just a general state of mind. Companies don't train unless they have no choice but to train and that point has not yet been reached.* [Group training agency]

This reluctance on the part of employers to train for future skill requirements has been noted in other studies [see MSC 1984, 1985a]. It would seem, therefore, that initiatives geared towards retraining adults in the areas of future skill shortages need to be aimed not only at potential trainees but also at employers. (See Chapter 5.)

- **Labels** - Labels used for particular courses may be off-putting for adults. For instance, the area most frequently cited as less popular was social, political and philosophical issues. This was also one of the areas to which providers said that they specifically tried to attract adults. However, one of our interviewees had found that, while such courses were not attractive when advertised, the content did prove popular when introduced during other courses. As this provider pointed out, this shows the importance of not simply running courses on the basis of apparent popularity alone. Sometimes providers retain courses which interest only small numbers of adults because of the importance and relevance of the subject matter.

- **Presentation** - Adult returners may want to learn about scientific and mathematical subjects but may find the way in which they are presented by providers unattractive. In our survey of the general adult population (Munn *and* MacDonald, 1988) the unpopularity of science and numerical subjects was not evident. When we asked the adults in that survey about the courses that they would like to do in the future, the category of 'mathematics/science/ technology' was fairly high up the list. Certainly, one of our providers - a school - has found mathematics to be very popular and this was explained as being the result of offering an adult-only course in this subject.

***Unsuitable courses*:** Only ten of the fifty-seven providers thought that some aspects of their provision were unsuitable for adults. Such courses tended to be those which were designed for youngsters under 18 or were 'youth-oriented' (eg pre-nursery nursing, 'the earliest modules') or those which were very general or theoretical. In other cases, providers (usually in the private sector) said that they might advise adults not to do the full course but to select those parts which were more practically based.

Planned changes in provision

Well over half (35) providers intended to make changes in their provision for adults. Most of these changes were in terms of the content of programmes offered although, in some cases, mode of delivery and the facilities available were also likely to be changed.

The effect of type of provider
Over 70% of public compared to around half of private providers talked of making future changes. Several private providers mentioned that, because most of their training was geared towards employers, they were constantly looking at the content and evaluating if that was what the customer wanted.

Changes in forms of provision: In terms of changes not related to course content, the most common are shown in the table below. These changes tended to fall into three main groups which were related to: flexibility or openness of provision; targeting provision; and improving facilities. It was interesting that providers most commonly mentioned introducing or expanding distance learning provision. In our earlier survey of the general adult population, we found that only a quarter of the respondents were aware that such provision was available. Providers moving into this area may find that, unless publicity about such courses is increased, uptake may be limited.

Table 4.6: Changes in form of provision

Flexibility
- More distance or open learning
- Accreditation of work experience
- Accreditation of negotiated independent study
- More short courses and packages

Targeting
- More adult-only provision
- More women-only provision
- Increased provision for ethnic minorities
- Day-time classes for the unemployed

Facilities
- Introduction of creche facilities
- Provision of special accommodation for adults

Expansion of course provision: There were also ideas for introducing, or expanding on, a great variety of different courses. These ranged from leisure courses (such as keep-fit and gardening) through personal development subjects to the more academic areas and also to specifically vocational programmes. Prominent, however, was a desire among many to become more involved in access courses (particularly the new Scottish Wider Access Programme) and other government and Training Agency backed programmes (including the ET initiative).

What makes providers change their courses or programmes? In some cases, these changes are produced by internal factors. But, as we shall see in Chapter 5, providers are increasingly trying to be responsive to external influences.

5 What makes Providers change their Courses?

There are many external influences on the provision of adult education and training, ranging from financial constraints to the nature of the local population Here we concentrate on two specific external influences - government initiatives and the requirements of industry and employers, influences seen by many as becoming increasingly important in the shaping of adult education and training provision.

Government initiatives

Half (27) of the providers said that they were involved in some sort of government initiative on education and training for adults. By far, most involvement was in Training Agency (TA) initiatives (23 providers).

> ***The effect of type of provider***
> A similar proportion of providers in both categories were involved in government initiatives. However, those in the private sector were much more likely than public providers to be running Job Training S Scheme programmes

The table below shows the range of schemes in which more than one provider was involved.

Table 5.1: Types of government initiative in which providers were involved

- Job Training Scheme (JTS)
- Restart Programme
- Involved in most Training Agency adult training schemes
- Community Programme training
- Training Link courses
- Second Chance Opportunities and Education for Women (SCOPE)
- Wider Opportunities for Women Programme (WOW)
- Jobclub
- Professional, Industrial and Commercial Updating (PICKUP)

Six of the providers we talked to were extremely wary of involvement in TA schemes. Sometimes they were chary about all of these initiatives because they felt that they imposed limitations and restrictions on them and thus removed their ability to provide individualised courses. In other cases, it was particular schemes to which they were opposed.

> *We were involved in the so-called new JTS... but I never did like it. I felt right from the outset that it was completely immoral but my management... were anxious that we should take part in it and finally I conceded on the grounds that maybe we should be involved, maybe we should try to influence it, maybe it would get better. Well, it didn't get better and I eventually convinced [them] that it'd be better if we withdrew from it because we were far more likely to endanger our reputation through involvement than we were to effect any changes in it.* [Group training agency]

As well as involvement in existing schemes, six providers talked about a desire to become involved in some of the more recently announced government programmes. These included

the SED/TA Scottish Wider Access Programme, the Enterprise in Higher Education scheme and the new Employment Training initiative. Five providers, however, were not sure if they would be involved in the latter either because of Regional policy or because they were unconvinced that the scheme was a good one.

However, despite criticisms about the way in which certain schemes have been run, two providers expressed the belief that the TA had been the main influence on training over the past decade.

> *They've created the situation where there have been great strides forward in the link between education, training and industry. This is becoming far more realistic than it has been previously, through the 50s, 60s and 70s. There's now a great awareness that training is a facility that is essential rather than just an add-on... I don't think there's another organisation we've had either through the education sector or the industrial sector who's made that move or the massive moves as quickly as they have.* [Private agency]

However, as we saw in Chapter 4, not all providers were convinced that there had in fact been many changes in attitudes to training among employers: some employers still seemed to believe that training for future technology was not necessary. Our own survey of employers (Lowden, 1989) supported this view. We found that the training undertaken by the majority of employers was reactive to change rather than the result of planning for it.

The requirements of industry and employers

Two thirds (40) of the providers said that they took into account the requirements of industry when deciding on what programmes to offer. Industry here seems to have been interpreted by the providers as covering a wide range of employers, including heavy industry, the business sector and service industries. The ways in which this was done are shown in Table 5.2. The list shows those methods which were mentioned by more than one provider.

Table 5.2: Ways in which the requirements of industry were taken into account (in order of frequency of citation)

- Courses are responses to requests from employers
- Industry's views taken into account when designing courses
- Links through exam boards, professional, validating bodies
- Industry liaison committees, industrial members on advisory committees/boards
- Courses offered are those thought to be popular with firms
- Links through local employer network initiative
- Market research undertaken to assess employers' needs
- Industrial sponsorship of students/courses
- MSC/TA requirements met in vocational subjects
- Links with Chambers of Commerce/Trade, Trade Councils, SDA
- Links through Trade Associations, professional bodies
- Interchange of teaching/training staff with industry
- Visits to employers' premises to talk about what's on offer
- Appointment of an industrial liaison tutor/officer
- Industrial support of research/equipment
- CBI contacts

Many of the providers stressed the importance of taking into account the requirements of industry and/or employers. In many of these cases (particularly in the private sector), employers formed a large and important part of their clientele and failure to provide the sorts of programmes that such clients wanted would result in going out of business. Even in the public sector, where employers formed a smaller part of the target population, courses designed for sponsored employees were on the increase because of the recognition of a new and lucrative market.

The effect of type of provider

Providers in the private sector were more concerned with taking into account the requirements of industry. Because of this, they were more likely to provide courses which were specifically tailored for a particular employer and also to carry out market research into the needs of particular industries. There was evidence, however, that public providers were beginning to move into this market and were becoming increasingly aware of the need to design courses for individual employers.

Some providers, however, felt that despite attempts to provide the types of courses that employers wanted, it was still very difficult to persuade industry of the value of training.

> *The most popular courses are still the courses that are largely inspired by legislation. First Aid is a very good example of that... The other very popular form of training is fork-lift truck driving. That's an area in which the factory inspectorate have a great deal of interest... consequently, it's one of the first things a factory inspector will check when he goes in because it's so easy to check. And, as a result, we get folk shooting in asking for this kind of training. It all adds up to there are very few employers who train for the right reasons.* [Group training agency]

This provider, together with another four (three of whom were in the private sector), were disappointed that the government was putting so much money and effort into the training of unemployed people 'to the exclusion of putting pressure on companies to train their employees'. These interviewees felt that no matter what attempts they made to take into account the requirements of industry, the amount of training done would not increase without pressure from the government.

> *Nothing else [but legislation] works - the voluntary system does not work. That's why the Training Act was passed in 1964 because it [the voluntary system] didn't work. The element of compulsion did work if it was handled properly and we're now back to the voluntary system again and back to the kind of thinking that existed prior to 1964... it's the thinking of the present government that the employer knows best. And the employer doesn't know best! It's a false premise. They will not train their adult labour force unless they see death staring them in the face - or the factory inspectorate staring them in the face!* [Group training agency]

A similar message has come out of our work and that of others when looking at employers and the adult training market (see Lowden, 1989; MSC, 1984, 1985a, 1985b; Tindall, 1982). As we pointed out earlier, our survey of employers indicated that although many employers do train, it is often in response to immediate needs rather than part of a long-term strategy. Responsibility for providing a suitably trained workforce lies not just with providers but with employers and, it would appear ultimately, government. We concluded in the study of employers' attitudes that this required a change in attitudes of employers and the co-operation of the training community, government and the individual.

6 Policy Implications for Providers and for Government

In this chapter, we draw together what we have learnt about providers' attitudes to adults and discuss the policy implications of these.

Extent of provision

The first point to be made is the diverse range of institutions and agencies which include adults among their clientele. Nearly all of the providers of education and training we contacted had adults among their student or trainee population and many had them in significant numbers. Even those institutions, particularly in the public sector, which have traditionally catered for 16 year olds are now involved in the 'adult market'.

It has to be said, however, that in some cases this move has not been the result of a strongly held belief in lifelong education; rather, it has resulted from the realisation that traditional student populations are declining and that future viability is dependent on developing a new clientele. As a consequence, providers are becoming more flexible both in the content and in the structure of courses.

However, some of the providers already involved in adult education expressed reservations about the permanence of commitment of new providers entering the field. They were worried that a re-emergence of traditional markets in further and higher education would result in the abandoning of policies to attract adults. The extent to which this is a legitimate worry is difficult to assess but, on the positive side, we did find a marked enthusiasm for adult students among providers who admitted that it was necessity that had caused them to move, in the first place, into the adult market. This enthusiasm was not simply a result of adults bolstering the student numbers, but also seemed to stem from an appreciation of the commitment shown by adults, the positive effect they had on the ethos of the institution and the rewards of teaching those who were highly motivated.

Policy Implication for Providers

Providers should not worry about a dilution of their traditional markets if they move into the adult market. Instead, such a move is likely to benefit providers because an adult clientele can have positive effects on both the teaching and the ethos of the institution.

Providers' experiences of adults

All of the providers in the study had positive things to say about the participation of adults. In general, they had found that adults were highly motivated, willing to work hard and made the most of their return to education and training.

However, catering for adults was not simply a matter of putting them into the 'classroom' or workshop and treating them in the same way as younger participants. Adults are not merely

older versions of traditional students or trainees. They bring with them their own particular problems which providers have to address. These include

- lack of self confidence
- personal problems
- learning difficulties

and

- expectations about facilities.

Policy Implications for Providers

Flexibility in attitudes, provision and timing is the key to helping adult participants.

Providers may need to evaluate their counselling and guidance support if moving into the adult market. They should consider having an adult education specialist among their guidance staff.

Requirements such as SCE passes may not be the most appropriate means of assessing an adult's ability to undertake an education or training programme. Providers should consider other means such as:

- pre-selection interviews
- practical tests
- assessment of experiential learning
- access courses.

The provision of childcare facilities would help to alleviate some of the problems faced by women participants in particular.

Flexibility in the timing and delivery of courses is important. There are a number of ways of providing for adults so that courses or programmes fit in with their work or home commitments. This includes offering:

- courses at times to suit particular groups of adults
- short programmes
- open learning courses
- part-time courses.

Consideration should be given to the teaching methods which other providers have found helpful:

- student-centred learning
- individualised programmed learning
- continuous and progressive assessment
- emphasis on practical rather than theoretical content
- one-to-one tuition.

The availability of concessionary fees is one means of encouraging adults to participate. However, many adults do not fall within the criteria needed to qualify for such concessions. The options of deferring payment or payment by instalments can be very helpful in areas of financial hardship.

Policy Implications for Local and Central Government

- If grant or bursary awarding bodies were to speed up their administrative processes, adults would know that they would not be left for periods of time with no means of financial support.

- Adults often expect certain minimum standards of facilities. Shabby surroundings put them off. Public institutions, in particular, have not got the resources to provide the kind of facilities that they would like. If adults are to be encouraged to retrain investment is necessary to help providers offer the kinds of facilities expected by adults.

Attracting adult students

The development of particular policies geared towards adult students can be looked at in two ways. Firstly, it can be seen as a recognition that this sector of the population has previously been under-represented in an institution and so can provide a means of trying to encourage their participation. Alternatively, it can be viewed as divisive in that it discriminates between certain groups and can lead to segregation. We tend to favour the former view because our previous study (Munn *and* MacDonald, 1988) showed that adults in the general population were still remarkably ignorant about both local opportunities and providers of education and training. Most of the providers in our survey did have some kind of policy on encouraging adult participation. Such policies included targeting publicity and information at adults, fostering the idea of catering for the whole community and specifying an age after which different entry requirements may be introduced.

Policy Implications for Providers

- Providers who are interested in moving into the adult market should make special attempts to gear publicity at adults.

- To target publicity at adults, especially the semi-skilled and unskilled, providers should:
  - publicise themselves in the places where adults tend to go
  - inform them about what is on offer and the potential benefits of participation
  - inform them about changed attitudes on adult participation.

Another way of trying to attract non-traditional groups is to offer courses specifically for them. Several of the providers in our sample offered programmes which were designed for adults or specific adult groups (usually women and the unemployed). Other providers either tried to attract adults to particular parts of their existing programme or found that there were aspects of their provision that were especially suitable for adults.

Policy Implication for Providers

- The types of courses which providers found to be particularly attractive to adults spanned a range of different subject areas, modes of attendance and course structure. This highlights the importance of diversity of provision for adults and the danger of treating adults as one homogeneous group.

Two of the areas which providers found to be unpopular with adults were the science/ mathematics and high technology areas. However, in our survey of the general adult population (Munn *and* MacDonald, 1988) this unpopularity of scientific and mathematical subjects was not evident. One reason for this may be that adults are interested in these subjects but find the way in which providers present them unattractive. The way in which courses are presented may be particularly important for those subjects in which adults already feel vulnerable. In these subject areas, enrolment may be encouraged if participation is presented as non-threatening and staff as supportive.

Policy Implications for Providers

- Particular attention should be given to the way in which courses are presented. Even subjects in which adults are interested may prove unpopular if presentation seems unattractive.

- It is important that providers remember that adult participants are, in general, volunteers and that if the 'product' provided fails to please, then these and future clients may be lost.

Relationship with local employers

Although providers in the public sector had directed most of their efforts towards attracting individual adults, they were increasingly turning their attention to the needs of employers. They were becoming more involved in local consortia with employers and they were providing courses tailored to the needs of particular employers. They actively researched the needs of local firms using a proactive rather than reactive approach, for instance, some public providers, as well as actively marketing their services with existing firms, were going out to employers who were newly located in the area.

However, this was not always an easy task for providers because some employers were not aware of the need for a long-term training strategy. This, therefore, affected the take-up of certain courses which were designed to provide skills which would be needed in the future, particularly those in the area of high techology. This is borne out by the project's own study of employers (Lowden, 1989) which showed the short-term nature of much of employers' planning for training. This suggests that equipping adults with future high technology skills is not just a matter of trying to appeal to individuals. Rather, as previous studies have shown (MSC, 1984, 1985a), it is a matter of inculcating in employers the right attitude to training. Although many providers try to take the requirements of industry and employers into account when offering courses for adults, they, by themselves, cannot change employers' attitudes.

Policy Implications for Government

- Using both publicity and financial incentives, government have a crucial role to play in determining the attitudes to training of individuals, providers and — perhaps in the long-run most importantly — employers . This is particularly important if adults are to be equipped with future high technology skills.

In conclusion

It seems inevitable that, in searching for new markets, more and more providers will be moving into the field of adult education and training. The extent to which the expansion into this market can continue is difficult, if not impossible, to predict. What can be said is that, at present, a wide range of providers seem to be having some success in attracting adults and that the rewards of this stretch far beyond the purely financial.

Providing for adults, however, involves much more than simply opening the doors and showing them that there are spare places. It involves wooing those who have not traditionally seen themselves as potential clients of these particular organisations. It involves providers showing a much greater degree of flexibility in terms of publicity, course structure and timing than they may have displayed in the past. It is vital also to try to change adults' attitudes to education and training. Lifelong education and training has to be demonstrated as being valuable and important in meeting the needs created by continual changes in both vocational and life circumstances. In addition, it is important to persuade employers that the training of their adult workforce, and the recruitment of adult returners, is an economic necessity. To effect these changes, government must demonstrate both a financial and political commitment to lifelong education and training.

The present demographic and economic changes have presented the education and training world with the opportunity to serve the whole community by offering recurrent education. However, if the potential of this opportunity is to be realised, more thought has to be given to easing adults' return to education and training and to changing potential participants' attitudes. There is a need for providers, employers and government to show a degree of commitment that arguably may have been lacking in the past. It would seem sad if this chance to provide lifelong education and training was lost because of lack of commitment or remained merely the implementation of a short-term response to diminishing markets. The commitment, once developed, should remain even if the numbers of younger people were to increase. Educational provision should be geared to both adults and young people. This will lead to a more educated population and a more flexible and competent workforce.

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ISBN
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Given the declining number of young people entering the labour market, many agencies, public and private, are now competing to attract adults to their courses. Their experience in recruiting and providing for adult students is the subject of this report, part of a three-year Government-funded study. The report focusses on such questions as 'How do adult students differ from younger entrants?' 'What kind of facilities do they expect?' 'How can they be encouraged to "stay the course"?'. In discussing the implications of the study's findings, the authors provide invaluable guidance for policy-makers and for providing bodies, as well as for teaching staff.

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